



STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
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CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION
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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Attorney General McGraw Warns Consumers of Scam Promising Low Income Individuals Federal Assistance

Attorney General Darrell McGraw's office was alerted on Friday that an organization calling itself "Mouch & Thompson, PLLC" had mailed letters to Charleston residents informing them they would be in Charleston to distribute one-time grants to assist low income individuals in paying their rent. The letter informed recipients to be at Mouch & Thompson's office at 221-½ Capitol Street on Monday, February 15, 2010, at 8:30 a.m. The letter guaranteed grant approval for the first 50 applicants.

"Offers of free government grants should always raise a red flag," advised Attorney General McGraw. "Fortunately, one of the recipients shared the letter with a diligent worker at the West Virginia Mental Health Consumers' Association who immediately realized it was a scam and alerted our office."

The specific scam stated the grants were to be awarded from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, usually referred to as the Economic Stimulus Bill.

The Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division immediately searched several state databases and found Mouch & Thompson, PLLC did not exist. The West Virginia Secretary of State's office had no listing for such a corporation. Law firms frequently incorporate as PLLCs, and a search of the West Virginia State Bar database found no such law firm. The City of Charleston did not have a listing for a business at the 221-½ Capitol Street address.

The letter was signed by "Wesley Mouch." An internet search revealed Wesley Mouch to be a character in the Ayn Rand novel, *Atlas Shrugged*, published in 1957.

After determining Mouch & Thompson did not exist, the Attorney General's office contacted the landlord of 221-½ Capitol Street to find out if the space had been rented. The landlord told the investigator for the Attorney General's office that the location was vacant and had not been rented. The landlord advised the investigator that the building had been broken into two weeks earlier but he had changed the locks and secured the building.

Knowing the building was supposed to be vacant, the Attorney General's office worked in cooperation with the Charleston Police Department to ensure that no one would fall victim to the scam. Charleston Police stepped up patrols of Capitol Street, and the Attorney General's office observed the location, waiting for the crooks to carry out their scam. The crooks never showed up, leaving a line of people waiting in the cold wet snow. The Attorney General's office then informed the people the letter they had received was a scam, there was no government grant money, and they were asked to return to their homes.

"Consumers need to do thorough research before providing personal information to anyone promising to give them free money.

There are limited grants available to individuals under many different programs. However, these grants require consumers to contact the government agency directly in order to apply. Legitimate agencies offering grants do not require consumers to stand in line for one day only in order to qualify," said McGraw.

Any consumer who questions the validity of any grant offer is encouraged to contact Attorney General Darrell McGraw's toll-free consumer hotline at 1-800-368-8808.

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